



FORCES 2016

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, ONE SUNDAY MY FATHER TOLD ME MY CHORE OF THE WEEK WAS TO TAKE A SMALL SPADE INTO THE YARD AND “ERADICATE” THE DANDELIONS - I had to look up “eradicate.” Once down on my knees, I began to wonder why my father hated them so much. I picked one and blew it; I didn’t realize I was releasing a barrage of seeds to float through the air to land in new places at the whim of the wind. Seeing me, my father yelled, “Don’t blow them. That only spreads them and makes more. Eradicate.” Thus, when he was watching, I would diligently pull the weeds by the roots, careful not to spill their tops; when he wasn’t, I would carefully pull the flower and blow it, spreading its seeds to curl their toes into the soil at the whim of their landing. What did he hate about them: that they were taller than the grass; that they were symmetric and beautiful? What did he want, only to see a conformed sea of green spreading as far as the eye could see, no variance, no riffs in the current, no plant standing more proudly or higher or more beautiful than the others?

This year Forces is a dandelion, many voices being blown in many directions searching for their good ground, the collective becoming individuals after being separated from the whole, only to become the single seed to produce a new flowering bloom. This year, most of the written submissions reflect being out of harmony with one’s surroundings, perhaps landing in unfit soil. However, ironically, the photos juxtapose the words: they almost seem to reflect the solace which the writers are searching to find, the moments of serendipity and being that make life harmonious for a small bit. Thus, we are reminded that the good seed and weed are as inseparable as the masks of comedy and tragedy. If life was easy, who would want it?

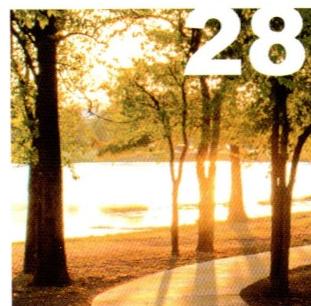
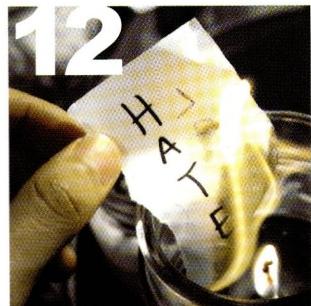
Thank you to the president of Collin College, Dr. Neil Matkin, and the Board of Trustees who continue to support Forces.

This edition is dedicated in memory of poet and “cook,” Jared Blackmon Chambliss, Collin Student Editor, who lost his battle with nature. The world is a better place because of his existence.

Special thanks to Marlene Miller and Donna Kinder.

R. Scott Yarbrough - Editor Forces

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F O R C E S

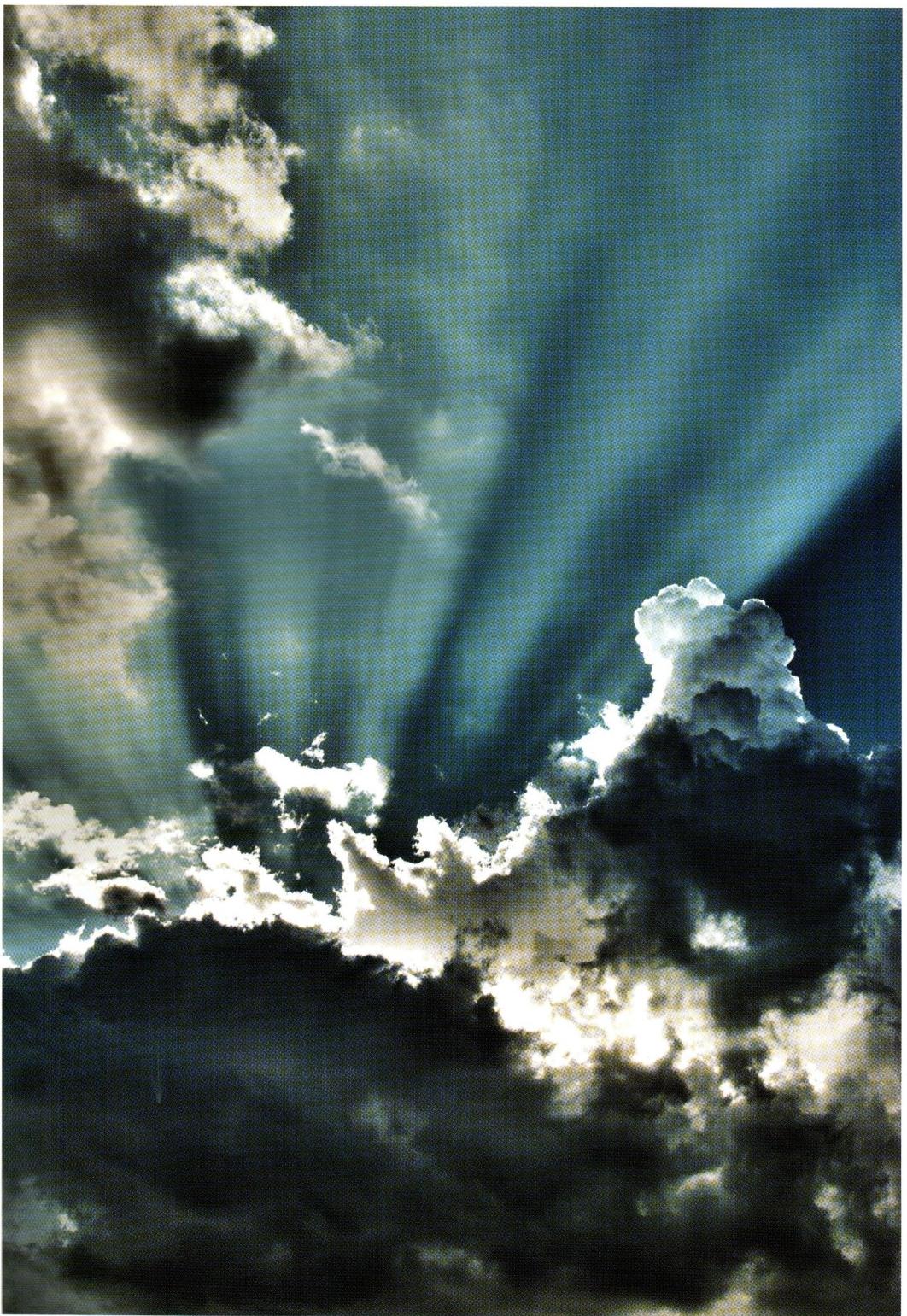
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POMEGRANATE Alberto Gutierrez



SUNRAYS Amy Bedinghaus

TROPICAL RAINDROPS

Deborah Sue Miller

Before departure

What will it sound like; rain in Papua New Guinea?

American city rain bounces

on concrete, car, brick. What will a tropical downpour sound like? When it lets up, will the rain be accompanied by a choir of birds? Instead of tires, will I hear breeze; instead of airplanes, will I hear raindrops consecutively toppling from one leaf to the next?

What will it feel like; rain in Papua New Guinea?

In the street,

rain tags me as I chase my five siblings; they kick water from the curb, splash puddles against my knees. We blabber on random conversation and make up little jingles. I scrape my big toe on a dead worm. In Papua New Guinea, instead of sidewalk and roads will there be trails of dirt? Instead of clear puddles will there be gloppy mud squishing between my toes?

What will it taste like; rain in Papua New Guinea?

Wylie, Texas rain hits

my tongue. I close my eyes, stretch back my arms with open palms, and let the cool circles of translucent blue roll down my face and off the tips of my red hair. Faith, the youngest, pokes her head in the house and hollers for Mom to heat up water for hot chocolate. The rain is chillier than expected, but nobody minds; hot chocolate, warm and frothy, has become traditional.

What will it smell like; rain in Papua New Guinea?

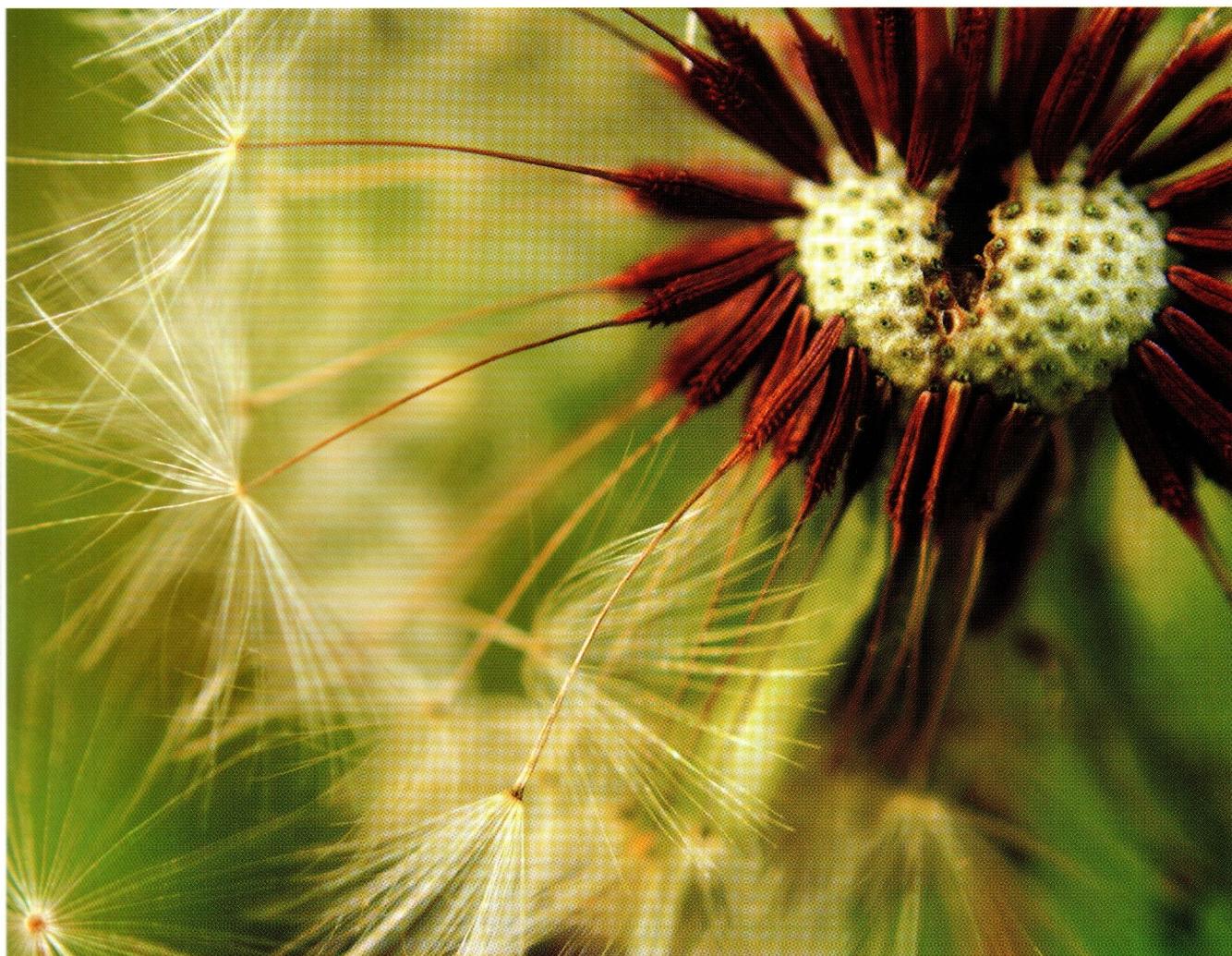
Week by week,

city air sneaks in and county air leaves town. The rain pushes pollution to the ground, washes it down the sewer, and makes the atmosphere fresh. The pitter patter of rain stirs mint leaves and gardenia flowers from the garden bed. What aromas stir the air in Mount Bosavi and Ukarumpa?

What will it look like; rain in Papua New Guinea?

Texas drought soaks

up the wet sky. A bunny investigates the strange phenomenon. Milk-colored ducks come out to play, laughing their squawk laugh and waddling their flippers around the neighborhood. I plop down for a second from running and let the raindrops paint my fingernails.



MAKE A WISH Lauren Mezzell

BYSTANDER

Marzia Mariwala

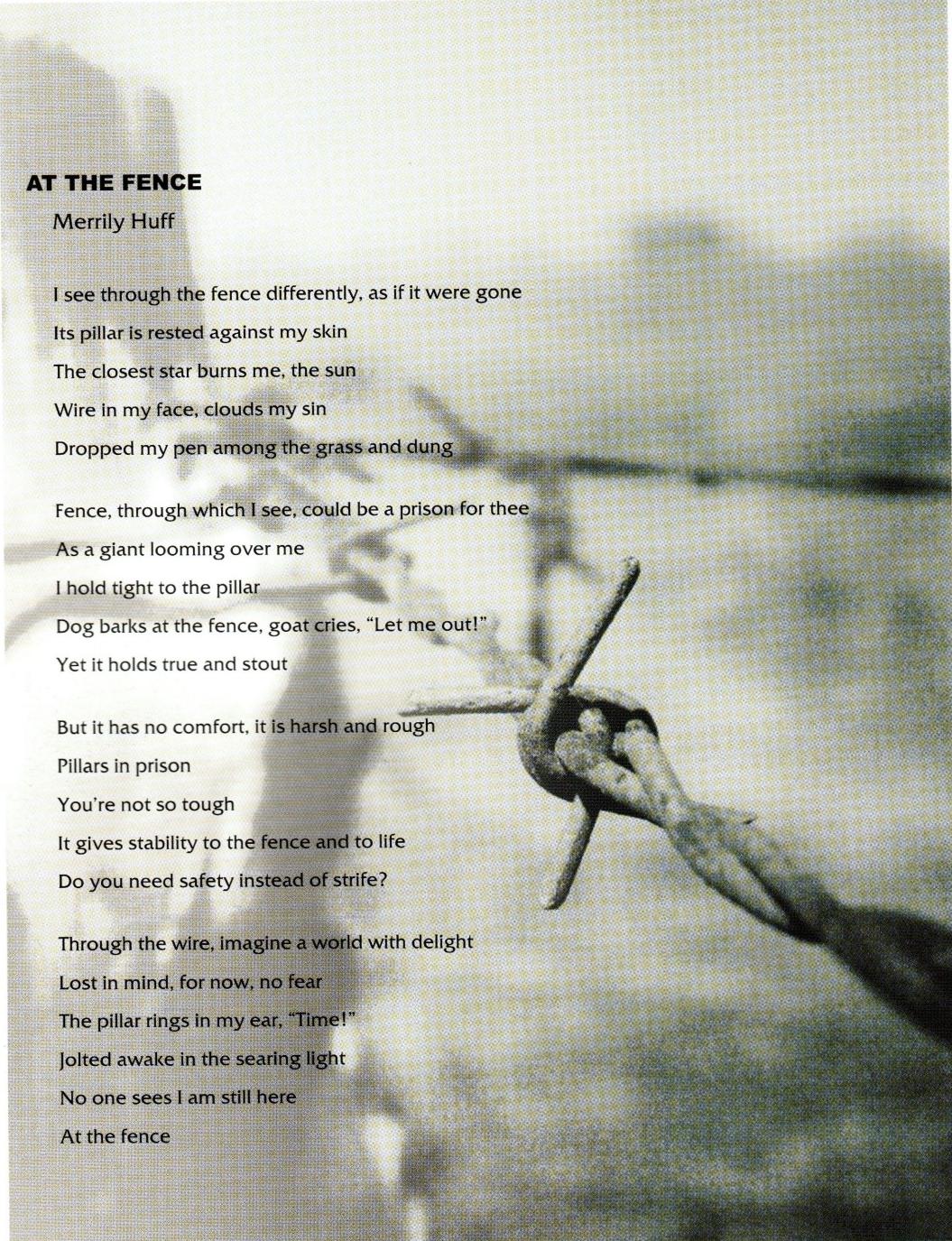
There's a loud commotion, a chaos in the surroundings.
But silence is overbearing; she sings her melodies with clarity,
and we are all lost in the midst of decisions:
courageous decisions, cowardly decisions, controversial decisions,
while there's a war raging just a few feet from us.

My feet scream at my brain. They seek permission to run,
The man needs help. He desperately needs help.
My eyes confirm my feet; brain don't you see:
the bruised body of the man, the dried blood on his face,
and still the senseless, constant kicking from the bully with the gun.

But I stay paralyzed; the car seat itchy under my petrified skin,
and I keep watching; waiting for someone to do something.
Why doesn't someone do something?
Yet all the cars are standing still, behind one another, in this surreal gas station.
We are each other's companions, but we are-after all-strangers.

Finally, after what seems like infinite hours of waiting and wondering,
the bully with the gun stops, his demeanor of a conqueror.
With his crown, his gun; he becomes a ruthless tyrant
and lazily walks towards his jeep, each stride more powerful than the other,
and just like that, drives away without a care.

Then all the bystanders come out of their shelters.
Someone picks up the broken, battered bike pushed on the floor,
while two people lend their bodies to the limp body of the man.
Life goes back to normal; each car drives forward.
We get our gas and try to forget.
What our eyes did see; when our bodies didn't react.



AT THE FENCE

Merrily Huff

I see through the fence differently, as if it were gone

Its pillar is rested against my skin

The closest star burns me, the sun

Wire in my face, clouds my sin

Dropped my pen among the grass and dung

Fence, through which I see, could be a prison for thee

As a giant looming over me

I hold tight to the pillar

Dog barks at the fence, goat cries, "Let me out!"

Yet it holds true and stout

But it has no comfort, it is harsh and rough

Pillars in prison

You're not so tough

It gives stability to the fence and to life

Do you need safety instead of strife?

Through the wire, imagine a world with delight

Lost in mind, for now, no fear

The pillar rings in my ear, "Time!"

Jolted awake in the searing light

No one sees I am still here

At the fence

BARBED WIRE Hayley Earnest

STRANGEST DEVOTION

Liberty Daye

Strangest Devotion describes the psychological impact of being raised in a home where emotional, verbal and physical abuse was commonplace. The poem expresses the long term effects of both being a witness to and victim of family violence and ultimately how it framed her future. The cycle continued, leading to enduring two marriages that mirrored her abusive upbringing. The years of suffering abuse was done so in silence, in large part, because of devotion to her family and her faith.

Stoic, broken emotion
Strangest devotion
All around twisted
Tangled and bound-up
No strength to get up
I'm gonna stay down
Tired and dried up
Wrung out, beat up
My crimes, I'm payin for
My cross to carry
My fate to be weary
Needn't runaway
I'm the cause anyway
I'm gonna stay down



MICHAELA Guadalupe Martinez



BURNING HATE Michael Nguyen

COMPENSATION

Rick Rinner

Mouth open fractured	Hands gripped at its uniform
Frozen in rage or fear	Unable to tear away
Skin cooling, holding still	Legs twisted
Bloody, dirty, pale	Broken, parts of a whole
Eyes grey	Uniform providing warmth
Rolled toward its brow	To the inactivity inside
Looking to forever	Sand under boots
Finding nothing	Gore drenched, crunching like scabs
Neck stretched in permanent breath	The smell
Unable to inhale	Human flesh burning even after all life is gone
	Work completed
	Wages are memories
	Dreams. Torment. Nightmares.

AT PEACE IN WAR

Ibrahim Safa

It scared me, how calm I was.

I thought death should be more profound.

At least a little angrier.

Ironically, it was a lovely morning.

The sun shimmered beautifully through
the window as it rose, hitting
my lifeless face.

And I, just a little boy, crouching under the kitchen counter,
hands covering my ears.

Shouldn't I be screaming?

Maybe not. After all, this was inevitable.

The dark cloud of a bitter end

hovered over our house for quite a while now.

I try not to look at it, distracting myself with

Small talk, meaningless card games, and the occasional forced laughter.

When is it going to happen?

The anticipation only made it worse.

Boy, did it pour that day.

As I was losing myself,

through all the deafening noises,

I caught a glimpse of my cousin in the other room,
Snoring.

And it didn't matter anymore.

I closed my eyes, and suddenly there was
no more screaming, no more crying,

no more pain, no more dying.

I'd found a way, made peace in war.

For all I could hear was my cousin's faint snore.

DEAD ROSE Christie L. Conklin



OV-307 ICARUS

Emily Zamelin

For Chris

The mission was to escape.

**They cheered when he burst free from Earth's atmosphere,
wept with hope as he crested Venus,**

and begged for him to turn back at the periapsis of Mercury.

**The shuttle sparked like microwaved aluminum
and our bold and adventurous moth of an astronaut roasted inside.**

Mission accomplished.

FLIGHT OF ICARUS Manu Satyan

THEN AND NOW

Elise Holland

The world,
7 billion people,
Some wealthy, some poor,
Some smart, some not,
Then there is me.
Separated yet connected,
There may be others similar,
But they are not me.

Belonging but isolated,
Bonds shattering then rejoicing.
Becoming stronger,
While also weaker.

Haunted by ghosts,
Shadows, illusions,
Growing as it drags behind me,
Becoming one with me.

Hollow, a crystalline shell,
Tossed and battered by the waves,
Broken, shattered, crumpled,
That *was* me.

Blinded by light,
Pulling me out of the darkness,
Waking me from my Nightmare.

Given home, shelter,
Providing warmth and comfort,
Accepting my weaknesses,
Nourishing my strengths.

Vanquishing demons,
Dwelling only on misery,
Shrinking into a speck of dust,
Finally separated.

Life filling in the hole,
Shaped smoothly by the waves,
Restored, fixed, secure
This is me.



UNTITLED Ethan Miller

PIETY

Daniel Michel

Insight or invocation:

Absent God,
is fear the ineluctable
weight of sleep?
I Am in a word
unbound:
every thought forged into
moments reconsidered.

His name I cannot see.

A sun-addled vagrant sits
with his back to the clamor
of shaded bistro smiles, alone
as I sit a half-hour after
the opening hymn -
I wish I'd talked to him instead.

HERE'S TO YOU, KEVIN

Aaron Ly

I lay my carnations by your casket
And I say my last few words
With other flower-bearing traffic
Upon the branches I hear birds

So He's called another one
He rises up, though faithful he will still die young
And it was no accident, albeit sung
"It's fair to He, with faithful un-
derstanding" simple times with laughter, smiles
A man was sick - Reversion child
Dependence as depression piles
So cloaked in guile his façade then cast a shadow of his soul that spiraled
Down into the ground before me, his body too
While an audience is forced to applaud
This skydive's resolution of unfathomable loss

"And so we are gathered here today"

A modest gathering of bittersweet
Defeat he rests in peace while I'm in pieces
As a Pisces: he was born conceited
He struts his fins along the shore but then the ocean line receded
Shuddered breathing represents the very life that you preceded
But can you feel it? A wind cometh over just for you and it repeated
The birds that chirped were just alerts for the calming sway of leaning trees and
Just for you, the rigid atmosphere was then and only then alleviated
The stranded Pisces on the shoreline passes peacefully while the clouds bulge out with precipitation
But he was forsaken, he's already gone
He made his mistakes and admitted his wrongs
He paved his way and tressed it strong
So until we meet again,
So long



AUTUMN Chisom Ogoke



COFFEE SHOP BAR Taylor Roseberry

FREEZE

Joseph R. Honescko

THE COUNTER FELT COLD AND WET TO MY ELBOWS.

I HELD MY PALMS FACE UP, PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE FOR MY HEAD TO REST. MY FINGERS REEKED OF THE MARLBORO'S I hid from my wife, and the whole place smelled like whiskey other men were hiding from theirs. I closed my eyes and pretended that time was frozen. I was transported to a place where I could be proud of the man I became, where I was the husband my wife deserved and the father our daughter needed. I stayed there for a while, dreaming, until time returned to its normal pace, and Allen, the bartender, brought me back to reality.

"Who's your meeting with today, Riley? Mr. Daniels or Mr. Beam?"

"I think I'll meet with Jack. Neat, please."

He nodded his head as he walked away. Allen was great because he treated everyone like gentlemen instead of cowards. He helped us hold on to the fantasy that we were good men, honest men, or even men at all. He was a lawyer for a while but decided he wanted less responsibility. Didn't we all.

Allen placed my drink on the cold bar, and I quickly brought it to my lips. I let the lukewarm liquid sit on my tongue, taking in every bit. I liked when a drink burned, as if it were punishing me for sipping it.

HE HELPED US HOLD ON TO THE FANTASY THAT WE WERE GOOD MEN, HONEST MEN, OR EVEN MEN AT ALL.



BOY WITH GUITAR Michael Nguyen

A poorly lit stage stood in the corner, and sometime around 8:30 this young kid, must've been twenty-three or twenty-four, walked on and mumbled his name into the microphone. The two pawnshop speakers amplified his words and guitar to the rest of the bar. His music competed

**THE KID HAD WON US OVER.
WE BEGGED HIM TO KEEP PLAYING
AND PROMISED TO BE RESPECTFUL.**

against the roar of a busted air conditioner and the mindless chatter of bitter, weekday drunks whining about how the world had it out for them.

The kid must've gotten fed up because, after a while, he announced that the next song would be his last, and that after, we could all go screw ourselves. He had grabbed my attention. I had seen many bands come through that bar, and this was the first time I ever listened. The other ten or fifteen people must have been intrigued with his announcement as well because they turned their attention toward the stage. We sat and listened like civilized men.

The kid covered a lot of faded away folk tunes. He probably would have been great in the sixties, but by the time he was born, protest songs were

out of style. He began singing “Mr. Tambourine Man,” and when he got to the line “let me forget about today until tomorrow,” we all cheered, causing some guy to buy a round for everyone. The kid had won us over. We begged him to keep playing and promised to be respectful. He agreed, and he played while we drank and sang along the best we could.

We wrapped arms around each other’s shoulders feeling the prickly hairs and sweaty skin of strangers. We inhaled the whiskey and beer from the breath of other men, and everyone complained of jobs and wives and children and

WE KEPT ALLEN BUSY WHILE WE PUSHED AWAY ALL OUR FEARS AND IGNORED EVERY BIT OF THE REAL WORLD.

lack of purpose in this world that was out to get us all. We kept Allen busy while we pushed away all our fears and ignored every bit of the real world. The kid kept singing, and we kept pretending that time was frozen. Every couple minutes, one of us would yell “Tambourine Song,” and he would play Bob Dylan again. Together we sang, “Let us forget about today until tomorrow.”

He ran out of material at about 11:20, and slowly, time returned to its normal pace. The crowd spilled out of the bar and by 12:00, it was just Allen and I. He had started closing up, collecting empty bottles and glasses. As the dish sink filled with water, I thought of my wife washing the dishes after her long day transporting our girl around and fielding her questions.

“What’s the white things in the sky?”

“Those are clouds, honey.”

“Are clouds the white things on the ground?”

“No, baby, that’s snow.”

“Will Daddy eat dinner with us tonight?”

“If he gets home from his meeting.”

She was making spaghetti, so it was probably messy. I pictured our little girl refusing to eat with silverware, and her hands and face covered in tomato sauce. My wife would laugh and call her silly as she cleaned up. She was strong and put together. She didn’t mind cleaning up messes. I wished I were more like her, selfless and sacrificial and brave. I wished I believed her when she told me I could be.

Allen finished the dishes and drained the sink. The busted air conditioner kept the bar from being silent, reminding us that it was still there, and that it was still broken. He offered me a ride home since I was a little impaired, but I told him I could walk. I stopped by my car to grab the gum I had left in there earlier.

The walk was further than I thought, and the snow was beginning to fall. I lit a cigarette to keep me warm, or at least, to make me forget that it was cold. I breathed in deeply as I pressed the butt against my lips. I could taste the paper on my tongue and felt the smoke find its way to my lungs. I made the fingers on my left hand dance in a pattern against my hip. I was still cold. I inhaled again, this time focusing on the warmth of the cigarette. I kept the smoke in my mouth allowing it to burn the top of my tongue. I let it sit there, frozen in time for as long as I could. I let it hurt and hurt some more until I couldn’t take it. I exhaled and time came back.

I was still cold.



MANDANCE Patricia Hoydic-Allen

OUTSIDE

Maddie Derryberry

“PINK LEAVES ESCAPE THE ASYLUM,” LINGERED THROUGH MY LOST MIND FOR MOST OF MY ADOLESCENT YEARS. IT WAS A DIARY ENTRY I HAD MADE, BACK WHEN I THOUGHT DIARY ENTRIES WERE COOL. I was a wanderer, always sort of seeking the happiness yet there were always plenty of obstacles. My voice was noiseless, the world spun far too fast, and all the memories were false. Man, I never thought I’d see the other side of the hill. Now, this isn’t a story about a screwed up kid, or how my mother couldn’t raise me, or anything too sad. This is a story about how I started inside, and found my way outside; I’m still outside.

I remember being about fourteen; my glasses rested at the end of my nose, my freckles spoke louder than I could, and most everyone saw, but never really investigated. I wasn’t interested in much, nor was I too worried about my lack of fascination. I really liked the color maroon, that’s about it. A lot of time passed and my person didn’t change all that much. High school was weird for me, because that’s when you’re supposed to start forming some kind of idea about your life or whatever, right? There are all sorts of curriculums and studies that just taught me I’m better off reading a good book than paying attention. It sure didn’t help, but it definitely gave me a few laughs and a couple of really cool friends, so High School wasn’t a complete burnout, I guess.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT HOW I STARTED INSIDE, AND FOUND MY WAY OUTSIDE; I’M STILL OUTSIDE.

People, like myself, and maybe you, I don't know, they realize you just have to keep going through society until you've found yourself at the outskirts, the place where you could be whatever you wanted, and not have a worry. Yeah, I spent a lot of my life waiting around angry, because I would rather be in my room listening to The Velvet Underground, or even some funky rap, anything but having to vaguely listen to someone's remark about the news, or their accomplishments. But I learned - I'm still learning, that I don't have to just settle and conform, I can go beyond what I'm taught, or what I have to observe every single day. It saddens me that not a lot of people see the other side of this man-made wall; I wonder how it'd be if they saw all the other colors I see that aren't on the color spectrum, how I've learned to think with rationality, but just as well without it. I'm already happy, but I still wander because I like it. Open

your eyes, don't make sense sometimes. It's alright I promise. Dance with no music, fall in love twice, and definitely don't think too hard.

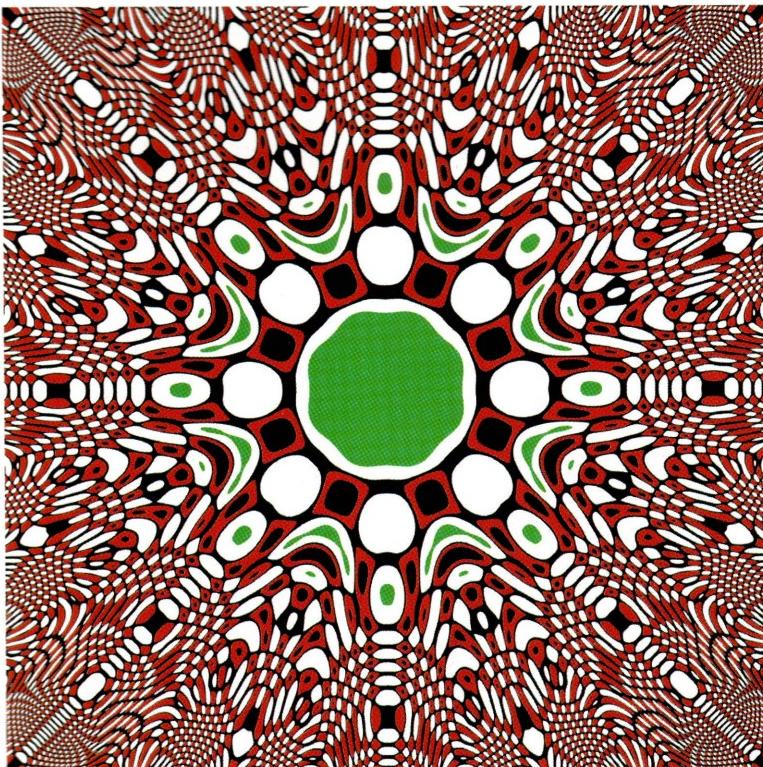
You've figured out already that I'm not the most structured being, and a lot of people don't like that. They ask, "What are you doing with your life?" or my favorite, "You can't just hope everything will work itself out, you have to do it yourself." Sure, I've reconsidered some things, but for the most part I fall right back to my beginning philosophy. I don't need to get to any finish line I just need to keep going, happily, and pick some people up on the way. This place we've built is so disgusting, and I could go on and on about how much I hate a lot of things. I did that, for years. Until I noticed it's a whole lot easier to just see the things that please my eyes, to listen to the leaves blowing in the wind rather than the cars on the road. I'd be blind if I looked at everything that was

before me, and deaf if I let my ears listen to everything I was told.

I'm a young kid, naïve?

Probably. But, I've learned a lot from the short time I've been here, useless and useful. Being inside the head I'm constantly in, I could be one screwed up kid. But, I've taught myself otherwise. After I have endured this much, I can see that my existence is worth something. Just a single short writing has managed to mentor me all while my head still spins. I'm the pink leaf in this asylum of reality.

I'm happier outside.



TEA PARTY Christopher Arthur

UNCLE LEO

Rudy McCallister

Dad made the coffee before the morning sun.
He put in his two sugars as was his custom.
He brought down the double barreled shotgun from over the front door.
And laid it on the rug resting on the ancient floor.
The oiled felt smelt so good, so warm, and so absent of homesickness.
He cleaned the inside barrels with rods and brass bristles from his grandpa's kit.
He stroked the oiled cloth along the smooth barrels in a delicate, familiar way.
He took the gun and slugs to the lean-to where old Uncle Leo had moved into
During his month of despair.
Dad noted that the moon was neither new nor full.
He thought that to be good.
Dad said, "Please forgive us of our thankless tasks,"
And fired the slugs into Leo's vacant head.
Dad went back to the house and made more coffee
And biscuits and cranberries for Grandma.

SNOWY SUNRISE Gilbert K.D. Hu





TREE Ruben Madrid

WITHIN TIN WALLS

Taylor Roseberry

Within tin walls,

The skeletons of cabinets scatter the floor
the bleached bones of ancient giants,
arranged in arcane patterns that I don't understand, but
my father does—a magician with his diagrams.
I must weave through the flattened maze or treacherous wood will
steal my shoe-prints and need to be sanded away to pristine grain.

Within tin walls,

My brother and I wage legendary wars,
with only sticks of wood for swords,
Over who will win dominion of the tin
and wooden kingdom, where sawdust
glitters—a fairy's forgotten secret,
and I try to catch it and to keep it.

Within tin walls,

I fall asleep on towers of wood to the lullaby of
nail-gun gunshots and the table-saw's whine.
The smell of particle board, oak, and pine cling
to my skin and tinge my mind like varied photographs
all toned with sepia and passing time.

Within tin walls,

the cloying quiet of a library curls like a sleeping beast.
Pillars of wood line the walls, the shadow of a proud forest
and the great sentinels they come from,
Stories spiraling on their skin like open secrets in a foreign tongue
that my father can read better than any book he's never laid eyes on.

Within tin walls,

My childhood resides with the rhythmic purr
of round sanders, the smell of sawdust, and
cabinets stacked in rows and lines. My
father murmurs math somewhere within,
a pencil carded behind an ear like an afterthought.



McKINNEY PARK Anna Cavnar



ALONE

Taylor Roseberry

I want to go
to the park
Alone.

I want to wander
around the trees
beneath the leaves
Breathe in the
soil that crunches
below my feet
and do whatever I please.

But how can I when
I'm frightened of
who may lurk
Waiting to hurt a
foolish woman like me
Who dares to do
what she cares
Alone.

After all, I hear
about it on the news
Everyday a new
story of abuse
A woman kidnapped
from her car at the gas pump
A woman killed
after a breakup
A woman raped
at the park.

So, what am I
supposed to do
in light of all
this grisly news?
Do I put my life on
hold and wait for
others so I'm not
Alone?

But then I wonder
is my world view skewed?
Is what I think
the truth of things or
some hellish fantasy?
Should I just go do
what I'm scared
to do despite
the possibilities
Alone?

I want to.
God, I want to
But I fear that I'm not wrong.



SEQUOIA Patricia Hoydic Allen

MOTHER EARTH

Mohamed Shammel

Earth, older than man itself

The culmination of time, rock, water, and wind coming together in perfect harmony

Making the Earth's mountains and glaciers so very charming

But what is becoming of this natural world

She is decaying, reversing on the path from where she came

But is she doing this to herself

No, a far greater evil is taking place

Her own inhabitants, her own children are corrupting it

But why, why would the children rebel against their mother

When the sun hits them with heat when it rises

The clouds cover them when she closes her eyes

When she felt angry and the earth started to shake

She resisted and rebelled and made sure to wait

She is now sad, surrounded by sorrow

Showering them with rain when she cries

Overflowing them with despair as the sea levels start to rise

And even so she learns to forgive and forget

Hoping that soon they too will learn to abet

Her once sweet and heavenly fruit now spoil

And the anger coursing through her inner core starts to boil

She patiently waits, hoping her children will realize she is dying

She has come too far to get to this point

But now, very soon, she will close her curtains on both her and her children



LITTLE WHITE FLOWERS

Hayley Earnest



FRONT DOOR Clair (Qu) Wu

PROPERTY RENTED

Kerry Jeffrey

THERE'S A PIECE OF PROPERTY, A LITTLE PLOT OF REAL ESTATE THAT I'VE MANAGED FOR QUITE A WHILE. IT'S NOT MUCH NOR IS IT SOMETHING GREAT TO SPECTATE. IT'S RATHER SMALL in size but tends to room a lot of people. It was created to be a space of charity. I have never been able to charge anything to anyone to live there; not one cent. It has always been a peaceful place.

It only has a meek four apartments right now. The tenants are very nice and kind; never causing any sort of trouble for me. I couldn't have asked for better tenants. I guess it's to be expected when this place is of a charitable status. It kind of promotes peace when you don't have to worry about such things.

A gentleman that lives in apartment #1 is my grounds keeper and maintenance guy. He got his preference when it came to choosing what floor to live on. He fixes all the little things that tend to happen and he takes care of the other tenants. He has a daughter as well. She dances and a talks a lot, but cute, nonetheless. She runs in and out a lot of the time and asks grown-up type questions. He watches over her very protectively. He is a great person to know; always sporting a smile.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO CHARGE ANYTHING
TO ANYONE TO LIVE THERE; NOT ONE CENT.
IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PEACEFUL PLACE.

The couple that lives next door in #3 seem to have their little issues but kinda get along. But I feel sorry for him sometimes. I always see him around doing little things here and there but not too enthused about it. As for her, I don't see her near as much. She's kind of a recluse and keeps to herself. He used to talk about her quite often though. She seemed to misunderstand him a lot. I'm not sure she is still around. I used to hear her laugh from time to time. It's been awhile. She had a sweet laugh, much like the laugh of her neighbor's daughter.

**THEY LIKE IT LIVING THERE.
I LIKE THAT THEY ARE HERE.
IT MAKES ME HAPPY.**

Apartment #2 stays active for the most part. It's home to five to six young women, all friends, and sometimes not. They like to flirt with my maintenance guy, just to keep him on his toes I guess. They invite his daughter over sometimes to watch girly movies and such. Very cute at best. They are the easy going, party-goers of the complex. Their music is always playing. Some of it is good music.

The last apartment, #4, is inhabited by a seventeen year old boy that I ran into one day. He said he hadn't a place to go. I took him in that day. He mentioned he felt estranged from his family most of the time. He's truly creative in the ways of

expression. I love to talk to that guy. He has great ideas. I think he has a girlfriend. I know I have seen someone there a time or two. He's not the one to live alone. He mentioned he hasn't been the same since the divorce of his parents. He talks to them when no one is around and feels alone. Although, he never forgets to tell them he loves them.

They are all good people. People that have fell on hard times but have survived and moved on. They like it living there. I like that they are here. It makes me happy. They are so patient with me, too. I change things around there often. Like right now, I am undergoing some rebuilding for more occupants to move in and they are really okay with it.

There's a piece of property, a little plot of real estate inside my heart. I've owned it for quite awhile now.



IN SEARCH OF CAFFEINE Kerry Jeffrey

THE KING PIN

Erin Roper

A passionate hobby or a serious sport?

Neither, but a lifestyle.

Bowling was everything.

That universally known din could be heard
even above the barrage of uninspired and tasteless
tunes blaring from the overhead speakers.

The ball in motion - a timpani roll, thunder
The connection of ball and pins - cymbals crashing, lightning

It all took him back to centuries past
To times when he ruled from the sky and storms
would color the backdrop of his wrathful countenance

His existence had become a new aged symphony, accented
by the stench of sweaty, preowned shoes and alcoholism
that which gave it authenticity.

Generations had passed since he had had his own kingdom.
There once stood no greater.

Despite the waning of his magnificence,
Today he ruled once more.
Times had changed, but not that much.

The champion of the Greek Church
The supreme deity or the captain of the team
Mere synonyms, it made no difference

Mount Olympus - their dominion, his throne
Nowadays, these polished lanes of pine and maple were his home.

Omnipotence outdated.



IMAGES Manu Satyan



UPTOWN TROLLEY Alberto Gutierrez

2:25

Hannah Smith

When we first saw dad again after four years,
his brown hair was as short as when we last saw him,
but not buzzed like it was when he was in prison.
Softly grayed with a mixture of grief and age,

In his glove compartment
The remnants of a recently chopped off ponytail
Show and Tell that his hair had gotten long after prison
the yellow-blonde of it spoke hard work in the sun.

It was long like that when I was born,
and when my brother was born eighteen months later.
Long like when my sister was learning to speak.
Back when we lived in the country and he would hitchhike to work.

He looked healthy.
The man on his felon card had not looked like my father.
His face had become so gaunt.

He said his children died the day we left him.
It took many years after this first reconciliation for him to get peace in this matter
and for us to understand what he had meant.

At first I'm sure that all he could remember was his six-year-old baby girl, daddy's girl,
screaming, crying, in the back of grandfather's car,
because she couldn't understand why she was being taken from him.
My nine-year-old brother's close-fisted fury,
and my pre-teen embittered stoicism.

Our common memories had grown stale,
he knew—
with this heavy sadness in his blue eyes that no one but God could've understood.
You could see that he was trying to resume a moment that had never known the luxury of pausing.

And yet the common cord had not been snapped.

The man who had taken us everywhere,
The light and the dark,
the daddy who was faster and stronger than any of the other daddies,
had been with Grace restored.

And I found that it was I then who needed Grace to love him again.

I never thanked my brother for initiating,
that first step toward years restored,
made possible by foreyear locust eaten.

HOW HYPOCHONDRIACS SAY 'I LOVE YOU'

Lissie K. Mays



THE LOVELY WORDS POSTCARDS FROM BEYOND

Dallie Clark



I was sure I would die from
a piece of plastic I swallowed
A sticker on an apple

I was just seven
“Uh-oh,” I thought.
“Will I go to heaven?”

I was sure I would go mad if
I thought something bad and
didn’t tell my mom.

Didn’t matter if I meant it
If I thought it,
It was real

I was twelve, I suppose
Who knows?

A sting meant
nodes

An ache
scoliosis

A twinge was
a torn hamstring

A tickle
cystic fibrosis

Must.
Touch.
Both.
Faucet.
Handles.

Hot and cold
Doesn’t matter which is needed
just so long as I
take hold

of a stupid
obsession
that has my mind as its
possession

a silly dis-
order
that puts my life back in
order

Stupid obsession
Silly disorder
That's what they all say

They try to be helpful
They are to a degree

There's no doubt I'm more free

Then you said you loved me

I believed it too hard

You even kept track of the times you said it
"I love you. That makes 26 times today!"

And I thought it was so sweet that
you wouldn't lose count

Such admiration repetition
Such numerical precision
Why, even I have my own arithmetic system to
keep everything in place

But what good is a system
when the door slams in my face?

You gave in
You gave up

26 "I love you's" a day?
Sometimes more?

How could you waste such valuable oxygen on
nothing more than a
mere concoction?

Ah, now I see
You're afraid
like me

A person whose
biggest fear is

a sudden deterioration of well being

Love

The sting
The ache
The twinge
The tickle

They have all returned to
let me know that
what I felt then
what I feel now

is not
stupid
is not
silly

So now I can be sure
There's no doubt I'm more free

Bet you wish you were me



RECORD STORE Taylor Roseberry

THE APARTMENT

Emily Zamelin

The acrid air of disrepair
fills my lungs with
resinous amber,
tasting like
tension
and clouded with burning incense and
unrequited love.

This prison cell hell, with
rusted hinges
screeching
for me to flee,
can't be heard over the spider-spun music
weaving hope between these bloodless and
necrotic chambers.

The dissonant and familiar chords fill
my ears
and I let it drown out any noise that's
not
him.

So the perfumed smoke
wraps around my neck and
teases me back to his bed and
swallows me into his arms and
plays me like his broken record.



TREE REFLECTIONS-NIGHT Yara L. Soto Hernandez

ELEGY OF CHATTANOOGA

Kelly Anne Triece

I scratched the eye of god;
Falling from the mountain's edge.
Can two people share one hallucination?
Love's kaleidoscope.
We caught a glimpse of heaven's door
Through a broken telescope's glass
Found in a motel near Chattanooga
Uncovering Galaxies.
I dropped the map on interstate 20
And I got lost on the road to you.
Twisting turns and knotty affairs

Hearts entangled.
The whisky doesn't pour fast enough
To wash away the taste of salty tears
Born from the image of your figure
Cutting ties.
I picture the stars that painted the sky
Like a million fireflies stuck on black canvas;
I glimpsed heaven's door near Chattanooga
Through your eyes.



MOONLIGHT Clair (Qu) Wu

ONE WAY

Ibrahim Safa

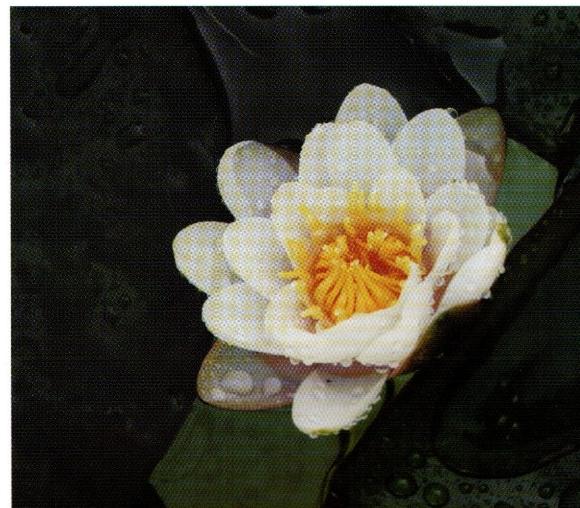
As long as signals run through my brain,
As long as blood rushes through my veins,
As long as my lungs are filled and drained,
Every thought, every drop, every breath is
You.

I try to take you out
Of my head, to forget,
But instead you sneak back,
Like a cat that somehow
Always finds her way home.
Resistance is futile,
I let my thoughts loose, and
For a moment simply
Get lost in you.

Those eyes, that face, that beautiful smile.
Can't even write a single line
Without wandering for a while.
It's like you're the Rome of my life
And all the roads of my thoughts
Now lead to you.

I yearn for you a hundred percent
Of my time, when I know that you
Will never be mine.
It's like you're my entire production, the cast and the plot.
And I'm just an extra in a meaningless scene that you cut.

I know, I know, I'll get over you...
Eventually.
But for now what should I do?
I guess I'll just stop trying to forget,
And for an eternity or two get lost in you.



LOTUS FLOWER Yara L. Soto Hernandez



GLASS BULB Christie L. Conklin

THE WRITING OF TIME

Teddy Lishan Desta, PhD

White hair
Wrinkled face
...you sitting before me
pinnacle of days.

Believe it or not—
I like the Peace in your furrowed face
the ripeness of Wisdom
the mellowness of Grace.

Peering long-out, staring far-beyond
Using your visage as the window of my eyes—
fearless I tread, I dare not stop here
believe it or not
I love my tomorrows as sketched in your face.

At Harvest Time — at your wedding time— when you change residence
When you put on your new clothes and leave the house
I wish to be there as you cross the bridge
to worship you from a distance, staying awhile.

I dare not to follow you over the chasm
(Not that I lack the courage to emulate you in that)
But I have to mellow first, as Time should be allowed
to whiten my hair
to furrow my face
to bend my back
to mature my grace.

Then when my future is shaped by my past
(As was yours)
Believe it or not
I will claim, I've lived the Life
Following you in your foot path —
the sacrifices of Love.



LOVING COUPLE Gilbert K.D. Hu

ON GOOD DAYS

Daniel Michel

We are raging
in awed spite
of our aging still-
life depictions passing
over again to be sure
no time is lost on
feelingless presence.

Even our own view,
askant with endless eschatology,
will never cease
to birth a fire in every temple:
“Smoldering loneliness
until it’s over.”

THE MONSTER IN MY ROOM

Thomas Pool

**WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, MOST NIGHTS I WOULD
LAY AWAKE IN BED WONDERING WHEN MY TIME WOULD COME.
HOW MUCH LONGER TILL THE MONSTER in my room gobbles me up?**

Grownups always dismiss this fear as a child's wild imagination. When was the last time anyone heard a news report of "Death by Monster?" Still, all my friends felt a presence, and there are countless stories about a monster under your bed or in your closet. Its stare covered me more than my blankets ever could. I felt like a prey. I was convinced that if I was not careful enough, something extraordinary might actually happen to me. In my adolescence, this childish fear became more faint. Although there certainly were times when I would turn off the hall light and then race to my well-lit bedroom, and I know most of my peers had done the same. We made fun of each other for these antics. You no longer believe in Santa Clause or the Tooth Fairy, so we feel the need to run away from the dark part of the house? It was not because I was afraid of an intruder or kidnapper. It was because something in me still felt the need to be cautious about a monster. But even teenagers know to dismiss this as a child's overactive imagination, even though the fear still feels real.

Years later my wife and I had our first child, a son. We took every precaution keeping him safe. We installed an alarm system on the doors and windows, developed good hand washing habits, bought hundreds

**ITS STARE COVERED ME MORE
THAN MY BLANKETS EVER COULD.
I FELT LIKE A PREY.**

of outlet covers, got a baby monitor camera, learned infant CPR, and changed the way we went about normal daily living for the sake of our offspring. He was protected from germs, strangers, malnutrition, and any other possible element that threatened his safety. We even purchased a gun and took a safety course. As a parent, you never give thought to the possibility of some sort of fictitious monster hiding under your child's bed. There are, of course, other types of "monsters." The real kind of monsters like disease, child abduction, bullies at school, reckless drivers in the neighborhood. Of course, like all children, our child was afraid of the dark, afraid of the monster that only spies on you when your parents aren't around. It was not uncommon for my wife or me to make multiple trips to his crib,

IT WAS THE FEAR OF SOMETHING SUPERNATURAL. THE MONSTER FINALLY CAME.

reassuring him that "Monsters are not real." As a parent, I dismissed his fear of a monster as a fear of the unknown or maybe he just wanted to be near his mom and dad, or maybe he was just watching too much TV. Grownups try to rationalize our understanding of the world we live in. For example, the reason there are so many movies about a boogie-man is because they make money in the box office. As an adult, we keep constant watch for real dangers in the world. "Son, buckle your seat belt," "Son, wear your helmet when you ride your bike," "Brush your teeth. Oral hygiene used to be a common killer." Parents are constantly overly cautious. Once you have kids, you wake at the slightest sound. A small turn of my bedroom's door knob is enough to bring me to full consciousness.

Long after all our kids left the nest and my wife and I retired, new fears arose in us. We still have the alarm system, but since there has never been a break in, we don't always set the alarm. We still have the gun, locked up in a safe and unloaded. We still sleep with a bat next to the bed. But now I am much older. I don't hear as well as I did in the past, and the bat really serves no purpose since it would take me about 4 minutes to swing it. If we had to dial 911, we would first have to fumble with the phone and search for the right buttons to press. Time goes by faster the older you get but in many ways, life slows down. We read stories in the paper about criminals who target the elderly. Would I still be able to arise to the challenge of an intruder?

One night I awoke to an unusual sound. The sound was very close to me. I could feel something distant, yet familiar. It was the fear of something supernatural. The monster finally came. It took my wife in her sleep. And I was filled with the same fear I felt as a boy - the monster had been here all along. The doctor told me that she just died of old age and natural causes and explained that the noise that woke me was "Cheyne-Stokes." Doctors don't believe in monsters like children do. Monsters are real. Growing up, I became less and less caution of the monster. Aging, I became more and more concerned with tangible monsters like infection and fraud. I had lost all regard for the monster hiding on the ceiling and hovering on your bedsheets. No one has any regard for it, until it enters you. When it leaves the body, it takes the human with it. I witnessed it, when the monster took my wife, the monster that used to scare me as a boy.

THE BOOGIE MAN'S FEAR

Kelly Anne Triece

His skin stitched of a child's fear
Clung to his bare bones.
Screams that fed him in the dark
Colored him like grey stone
One shriveled hand started to quake
His sweat made of blood
Dripped sluggishly from his palm
Staining the office rug.

"Boogie what is it you fear?"
He looked up. I gulped.
The terror that stained his eyes
No man could sculpt.
He spoke so fast in a wail
No time to react.
After seven long sessions
Mr. Boogie cracked.

He Wailed,

"A creature
A creature more terrifying than me
It eats, eats, eats and eats.
It eats until it pukes and eats some more
Mouth consuming and fuming
Fingers sucking and picking
As others starve in the streets.
It eats.

This creature
This creature more horrific it turns
It burns, burns, burns and burns
It burns forests to ground and beauty to ash
Trees dying and crying
Animals fleeing and weeping
Nothing left but metal to yearn
It burns.

The creature
The creature murders for the thrill
It kills, kills, kills, and kills
It kill's in the name of god and in hate's
Blood pouring and dripping
Necks cracking and snapping
Screams in the night like a siren's shrill
It kills.

These creatures
These creatures conquer the world's supply
They multiply, multiply, multiply and multiply
They multiply for pleasure; multiply for control
Lands filling and overflowing
Rivers fading and eroding
Like parasites of the earth; they occupy
They multiply."

A silence hung between us
Like a noose it swung
A truth to true to ignore
On my lips it clung.
I babbled out the question
"What is it you fear?"
Laughter like a squealing break
Rung deep in my ears

Boogie's words dripped of mania
"He's in the mirror."
I shouted "get out creature!"
"Get out! Disappear!"
The mirror on the wall quaked
As he slammed the door
My trembling reflection more
Terrifying than before.

I wrote in his file conflict of interest.

AN ANGEL UNDER STREETLIGHT

Aaron Ly

In silence, seen, forgotten
 With fingers interlocking
 Twining versed rhymes of vocal lines
 She unsheathes them from her pockets
 Soft and simple, bittersweet,
 Cylindric candlelight that brightens up these concrete streets
 They greet the ones still plotting silhouettes of shadows stopping in their place
 dancing juxtaposed to contrasts in the light,
 Tonight they dance and jig and sing and swig beneath that candle bright
 When power outage is the fright that strives
 to curtain call those sweeping silhouettes of candid borealis paradox in warmth
 Instead it signals stripes of black and yellow light
 that canvasses the painting on this Siegfried situation where the dragon is the night

**UNTITLED**

Maria Alejandra Ramos

So that Dragon slights his head, because complacency is dead
 Will they prevail or will they fail or worse: Forsaken land; Forsaken tread
 We squint our eyes and see the prize is predatorial, now lust is dead
 Unto the living we sacrifice a pain that won't suffice, like sacrilege
 The crippled streetlight topples over
 And the sound that is produced vacates the air of its pollution
 The whistling sound of wind snuffs away the fire from the candle before it fades into the moment
 The outage subsides and the air is alive with only buzzing of the broken streetlight
 as she treads toward the scene and steals her heart inside her head
 An Angel in the night, she casts a streetlight in its stead.

Now a feather falls softly like snow toward the ground
 Feathers that never fell before
 White Wings are now stripped with every step,
 And when she enters center stage they are already ripped apart
 She shifts her hands and grips the mic
 And it resounds within your cells
 Now those feathers that have slipped away from where her wings once were
 In a damnation to the name of Lucifer she tipped the mic and flipped the switch
 Channeling her body, her soul, to her lips she allowed her voice to bridge the gap
 Between her slender neck and those fallen feathers
 Neither the bass nor the treble clef are enough to contain the overture
 She flies but you don't see wings
 The noir of lights and darks retreated
 I am left shaken at my core
 From the Sonata of the Angel in the Streetlight
 Who is a normal girl no more

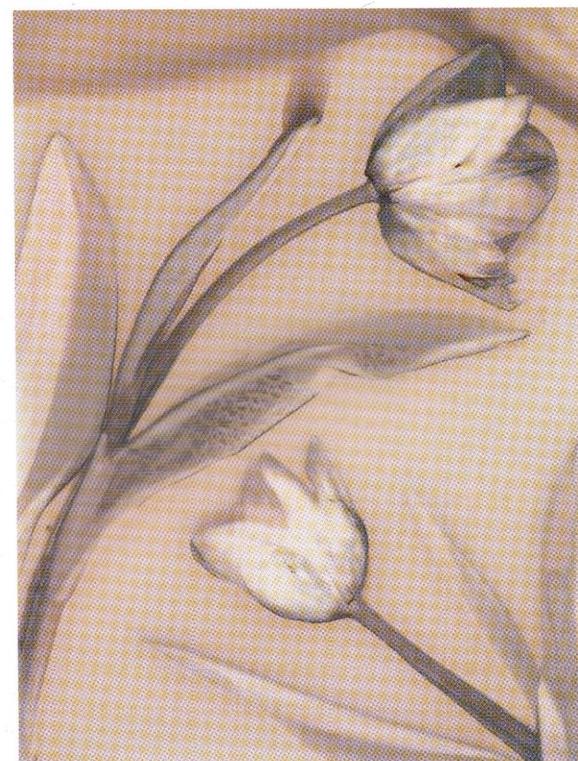
HAUNTED

Marc Pappas

Something haunts me in my sleep.
Echoes of a long forgotten past,
creeping through corners and shadows.
It whispers in my ears thoughts of depression
and chains me down with my own insecurities.
My arms reach out around me,
only to find empty shells of friends,
ghosts of those who were there till the end.

Something haunts me in my wake.
Chasms abound at every footstep,
threatening to fall in an endless abyss.
My ears catching wind of an eerie tune,
one none could hear but me.

Something stalks me in my dreams.
Sleeps eludes me as my body gets up
and leaves my spirit behind.
Its icy breath swells upon my throat
and its fingers claw down my back.
Even should I break it's grasp,
I can't escape the song
for it is faster than I can run.
This song is unending.
The music keeps calling and I'll never stop hearing it,
I only wish someone else could hear it too.
I don't want to feel alone anymore.
Suicide is a silent song,
and my heart will sing me to sleep.
Just let me rest in peace.



FLORA GHOST / TULIP'S LAST IMPRESSION

Amy Bedinghaus



RAIN KISSED GERBERA DAISY Deborah Sue Miller

TORTILLAS

Elizabeth Mercado

**MY MOTHER SAID THAT ONCE, WHEN A YOUNG
WOMAN KNOWS HOW TO MAKE TORTILLAS BY HAND, THEN SHE
IS READY TO GET MARRIED.**

"Loli, ben ayudé me con las tortillas que ya viene tu papa a casa."

So I do as she says: I come to help her make tortillas.

"Coming mama." It seemed like every time I sat down to do my homework, she called me to do something.

As I walked down the stairs I could smell the sweet tradition. Refried beans. Gizo de carne and yellow rice. It's the best smell in the world.

As I walked into the kitchen, mama started to complain. "Loli, why do I always have to tell you to come help? A woman should always look around to see where she is needed.

"Aye, Mama. Please don't start. I was doing my homework. I have a big exam coming up, and I want to make an A."

Mama came into the kitchen from the laundry room. She carried a basket full of white bed sheets. I could barely see her little plump figure over the basket. She set the basket down on the island of blue and white tiles and started to fold.

"Why do you have to start?"

**IT SEEMED LIKE EVERY TIME
I SAT DOWN TO DO MY HOMEWORK
SHE CALLED ME TO DO SOMETHING.**

My mama laid the white sheets in the basket and placed one hand on her hip, "Loli, you're twenty-two years old. You are still in school and have no boyfriend. When I was your age I already had two little kids under the age of six and a whole house to take care of. What else am I supposed to talk about?"

"Si, mama, but things have changed. Now there are so many opportunities for a woman. I want to be a lawyer and help people. Remember when Tia Rosa needed a lawyer to help her with her immigration papers? But she didn't have the money to pay for one, so they deported her. She had to leave her eight kids to go to a country she hadn't been to in thirteen years

I COULDN'T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT MAMA AND HER LIFE AS A HOUSEWIFE.

"Okay, Okay. Yo entiendo. I understand. But family and housework come first. Always remember that. She finished folding the sheets and walked over to the wooden cabinet and took out a bag of Maseca and handed to me.

I took the corn flour and placed half the bag in a big brown bowl. I looked over at mama. She tasted the food. I knew she tasted it for salt.

After kneading the tortilla masa, I took the ends of it and made it into little bolitas. As I was making the bolitas I heard a loud bang like someone fell down the stairs. It caused my stomach to leap. Mama was at the stove stirring the yellow rice and dropped her mixing spoon.

"What was that?" I asked my mama.

Then a little voice yelled out, "Sorry it was me with the soccer ball." It was my little brother Tony from upstairs. Mama picked up the spoon she dropped and yelled at the ceiling.

"Don't kick the walls Tony, or I am going to go upstairs and give you a chanclaso."

"Ok, mama. Sorry it won't happen again" he said.

Once I finished making the masa into bolitas, I took out the tortilla press and placed the comal on the stove at medium low.

"I will help you," said Mama, pushing me over a little so she could position herself in front of the tortilla press.

The doorbell rang, and mama went into a sudden panic. She called my little brother and sister down stairs. "Tony, Daniella, come eat." Mama then came back to the kitchen and saw that I was still in my sweats. "Loli, go change. A woman should never be in her house clothes after 12 pm."

"Aye mama, for real?

"Apúrale, Loli. She motioned me up the stairs. She opened the front door and greeted all the men. I could hear them thank her. I couldn't help but think about mama and her life as a housewife. She lived for others and loved it. I wondered if I could ever serve the way she did. But instead of serving a husband and kids I would serve people that needed me to fight for them. I would be a voice for those that didn't have one. So right now I was going to use mine.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

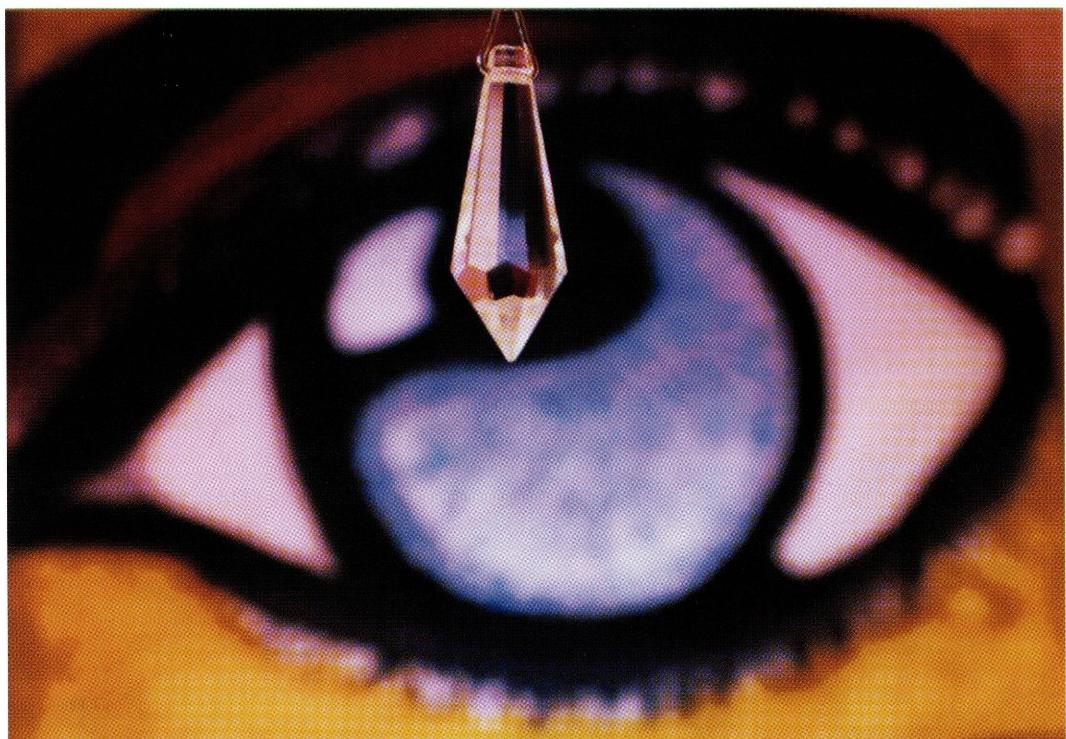
Anna Strakele

Insidious male politicians sit around
Discussing issues affecting only women.
So ignorant to the reality,
The wisdom of women fills them with fear.
It's the elephant in the room.

Their misogyny is obvious with the words they've spoken,
The decisions they've made,
The research they've disregarded,
The expert advice they've ignored.
It's the elephant in the room.

Their interference makes their goal clear:
Control of women's lives,
Control of women's bodies,
Subjugation of women in society.
It's the elephant in the room.

Women deserve education and empowerment
Women deserve respect and trust.
Women deserve freedom.
Women deserve choice.
It's the elephant in the room.



CRYSTAL CLEAR Alisha Vance

LADY LIFE

Ibrahim Safa

She's a loopy scientist, randomly selecting lab rats,
Throwing them in her maze.

I'm up next.

Driven by the smell of cheese,
a primordial urge
concocted by my significantly
Insignificant reptilian brain,
I search for my trap.

She's a boring hot chick.

She blabbers on, spilling her secrets,
But I'm not listening. All I see is how sweet
Her lips will taste at the end of the date.

But it's far from sweet.

It's damp, sticky, and uncomfortable,
Like having to walk ten miles back to camp
In Jezzine, Lebanon with water in my shoes,
Because Fadi thought it would be "fun" to jump
In a puddle that turned out to be a couple feet deeper than anticipated.

She's a grandmother drinking tea on the porch,

Watching the sunrise every morning.

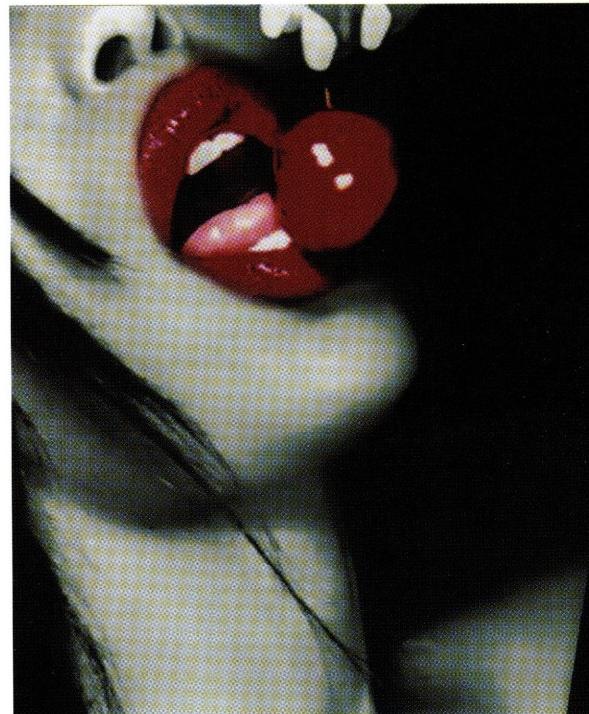
She tends to her garden, reads her favorite book again,
and cooks for her grandkids.

"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

The strong tides of dreams and aspirations pulled me too deep
Into my own head.

I smother my pride in ketchup, so
it'll taste better as I swallow it.

The knowledge of my ignorance takes the wheel,
Blasting "just enjoy the ride" on repeat,
As my hopes jump feet first into the next puddle,
Maybe this one's not two feet too deep.



CRAVING Liberty Daye





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